

# History and Authority of the Joint Economic Committee

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Joint committees are composed of members from both the House and the Senate. The work of these committees generally involves conducting studies and overseeing aspects of congressional operations. Although some joint committees possess the power to hold hearings and call witnesses, none is able to report legislation.<sup>1</sup> This report focuses specifically on the Joint Economic Committee.

## History and Authority of the Joint Economic Committee

The Joint Economic Committee was first established by the Employment Act of 1946.<sup>2</sup> Originally entitled the Joint Committee on the Economic Report, this committee was vested with three primary functions. First, the committee was to monitor the subjects included in the President's yearly Economic Report. Second, the committee was to identify ways to coordinate federal government programs in order to promote a national policy on unemployment and other related economic matters. Third, the committee was to produce a yearly report in response to the President's Economic Report to be released not later than May 1.

In addition to its three primary functions, the role of the Joint Committee was expanded in 1949<sup>3</sup> to include the issuance of a monthly publication on economic indicators. Later, in 1956, the committee's name was changed to the Joint Economic Committee.<sup>4</sup> During this same period, the due date of the committee's economic report was moved to March 1.<sup>5</sup> Finally, the Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 established the additional duty of submitting a report to the House and Senate Budget Committees analyzing the short- and medium-term goals contained within the President's Economic Report.<sup>6</sup> This report is due each year on March 15.

## Membership

The membership of the Joint Committee was originally comprised of seven members from the House and seven members from the Senate.<sup>7</sup> The partisan distribution of the committee was, as much as possible, to reflect the relative membership of the majority and minority parties in each of their respective chambers. After some adjustment, the membership was ultimately set at a total of 20 members, with each chamber's contingent consisting of six members from the majority and four from the minority.<sup>8</sup> The Employment Act of 1946 stipulates that committee members are appointed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House.<sup>9</sup> In the House, the Speaker

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<sup>1</sup> For further information, see Joint and Select Committees, in *House Manual, One Hundred Eleventh Congress*, H.Doc. 110-162, 110<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., [compiled by] John V. Sullivan, Parliamentarian (Washington: GPO, 2009), §§1108-1112.

<sup>2</sup> This act also created the Council of Economic Advisers to assist and advise the President in the preparation of the Economic Report to be transmitted to Congress within 60 days of the beginning of each congressional session. P.L. 304, 79<sup>th</sup> Congress, 60 Stat. 23, approved February 20, 1946.

<sup>3</sup> P.L. 120, 81<sup>st</sup> Congress, 63 Stat. 264, approved June 23, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> P.L. 591, 84<sup>th</sup> Congress, 70 Stat. 289, approved June 18, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> P.L. 405, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, 62 Stat. 16, approved February 2, 1948.

<sup>6</sup> P.L. 95-523, 92 Stat. 1887, approved October 27, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> P.L. 304, 79<sup>th</sup> Congress, 60 Stat. 23, approved February 20, 1946.

<sup>8</sup> P.L. 90-2, 81<sup>st</sup> stat. 4, approved January 25, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> P.L. 304, 79<sup>th</sup> Congress, 60 Stat. 23, approved February 20, 1946.

traditionally defers to the minority leader in the selection of the minority committee members. In the Senate, the practice has been for the committee membership to be chosen by the majority and minority party leaders and confirmed via the resolutions making committee assignments that are passed at the beginning of each Congress.

The chair and vice chair of the committee rotate between the House and the Senate each Congress. If the House and Senate are controlled by different majority parties, the chair and vice chair represent the majority party in each of their respective chambers. The most senior minority party member of the chamber opposite that of the chair is the ranking member.<sup>10</sup>

Although the Joint Committee has no legislative jurisdiction, it is authorized to hold hearings on the Economic Report for the purpose of receiving testimony from Members of Congress, government agencies, and the general public.<sup>11</sup> Under the committee's rules, 10 members of the committee constitute a quorum for conducting business. An affirmative vote of 11 committee members is required to issue its reports to Congress; any member is allowed to make a supplementary or dissenting report from the majority report.

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<sup>10</sup> Joint Economic Committee, in *Rules Adopted by the Committees of the House of Representatives*, 111<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., compiled by the House Committee on Rules (Washington: GPO, 2009), pp. 359-365.

<sup>11</sup> P.L. 95-523, 1978.